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PHYSICIAN ALERT INFLUENZA VACCINE

October 13, 2004

TO: California Physicians and Health Care Providers

SUBJECT: INFLUENZA VACCINE ALERT

This letter is to answer some of your questions regarding the shortage of influenza vaccine and to urge your cooperation in ensuring that the available vaccine is *only* administered to persons belonging to the strict criteria set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). On Friday, October 8, 2004, the California Department of Health Services (DHS) issued an Order to Control Influenza Vaccination to limit flu shots to those at highest risk for serious illness or death from influenza. This document is attached and should be posted where influenza vaccination is being administered.

Background

CDC was notified by Chiron Corporation that none of its influenza vaccine (Fluvirin[®]) would be available for distribution in the United States for the 2004–05 influenza season. As a result, approximately one half the expected supply of injectable trivalent inactivated vaccine will be available.

This season the available influenza vaccine in the United States is 54 million doses of Fluzone[®] manufactured by Aventis Pasteur, Inc., and at least 1.1 million doses of live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV/FluMist[®]) manufactured by MedImmune.

Since the California public health influenza vaccine supply was ordered from Chiron, DHS will not be receiving adult influenza vaccine for local health departments. Physicians who are in the Vaccines for Children program are not affected and will receive the full amount of vaccine ordered from Aventis. We are exploring all options for obtaining additional vaccine and will keep you abreast of this and any other further developments throughout the flu season. Local health departments will be assessing current vaccine status and we request your cooperation in this process.

These are answers to some of the most pressing and commonly asked questions from physicians and other providers across the state:

What are the CDC/ACIP priority groups for influenza vaccination?

Because of this urgent situation, CDC, in coordination with its Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP), issued interim recommendations for influenza vaccination during the 2004–05

season. The following priority groups for vaccination with inactivated influenza vaccine this season are considered to be of equal importance and are:

- all children aged 6–23 months*;
- adults aged 65 years and older;
- persons aged 2–64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions*;
- all women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;
- children aged 6 months–18 years on chronic aspirin therapy*;
- health-care workers involved in direct patient care^s; and
- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children under 6 months old^s

*Certain children under age 9 years require 2 doses of vaccine if they have not previously been vaccinated. Doses should **not** be held in reserve to ensure that 2 doses will be available. Instead, available vaccine should be used to vaccinate persons in priority groups on a first-come, first-serve basis.

§Intranasally administered, live, attenuated influenza vaccine (FluMist) is an alternative to injectable inactivated vaccine that can be encouraged for health care workers (except those who care for severely immunocompromised patients in special care units) and adults caring for children aged <6 months.

If a person falls into a priority group designated by CDC and your practice does not have any flu vaccine, where should they be referred?

Local health departments are assessing vaccine supply and may provide flu shots as vaccine becomes available. Many private flu shot vendors will not be continuing their flu shot clinics. Some clinics may be listed by zip code on the public website www.lungusa.org. We strongly encourage local physicians to work with their colleagues and the local health department to determine viable patient referrals or opportunities for reallocating vaccine.

What if my patient is in a non-priority group and wants a flu shot?

By Order of the State Public Health Officer, “all health care providers in California shall limit influenza vaccination to persons in high risk categories.” This Order to Control Influenza Vaccination should be posted prominently. Health care providers should refrain from vaccinating healthy individuals age 50–64 years and household contacts of persons in the above priority groups. A screening tool can also be used to determine if a patient should receive a flu shot (see attachment).

Please remind your patients that they are being asked to not get a flu shot so there will be enough vaccine for those most vulnerable to influenza complications.

Will there be an effort to re-allocate influenza vaccine?

The overall goal is to target vaccine to those who need it most in an equitable manner. CDC is currently investigating the status of the remaining doses of vaccine in the U.S. and is re-allocating Aventis vaccine, where possible, to those serving priority populations.

What else can be done to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, like the flu?

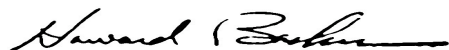
Whether or not individuals are vaccinated, people can take the following steps to stay healthy and help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, like the flu:

- Stay home when you are sick to avoid the spread of infection to co-workers and friends.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, your sleeve, or your elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water or hand sanitizer to help protect yourself from germs. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, drinking plenty of water, exercising, and getting plenty of rest.

CDHS has a number of materials available to help spread the word about respiratory disease prevention. These materials are multi-lingual and promote the above messages. You can download these materials at the CDHS Immunization Branch flu web page (www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/izgroup/flu/htm) in the "disease control" section and printed color copies are available from your local health department.

How can I respond to people concerned about the flu vaccine shortage?

While the vaccine supply situation is serious, physicians and health care providers should reassure concerned individuals that local, state, and federal health organizations are working closely with vaccine manufacturers and distributors to do all they can to help those most vulnerable to get needed flu vaccine.



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Attachments:

CDHS Order to Control Influenza Vaccination
Flu Vaccination Assessment